

## Sport

# Sukova shuts door on Sanchez

NEW YORK, Sept 11: Call it the Upset Special Open. From opening day nearly two weeks ago through the women's semifinals, the US Open has been a wild and wacky affair, with favourites swept out of the year's final Grand Slam tournament with — for them — alarming regularity, writes AP.

On Day 1, ninth-seeded Petz Korda was an upset victim. No 6 Michael Stich, No 16 Andre Agassi and the women's No 7 seed, Jennifer Capriati, fell the next day.

No. 13 Ivan Lendl, a three-time US Open winner was gone on Day 3; No. 3 Stefan Edberg, the two-time defending champion

pion, was dispatched on Day 4; and No 11 Goran Ivanisevic and women's No 9 Anke Huber were sent away on Day 5.

Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Helena Sukova, a "golden oldie" in this age of teen-age phenoms, continued the trend Friday by picking off second-seeded Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario 6-7, 7-9, 7-5, 6-2 to grab a spot in Saturday's women's final. Sukova, seed 12th, will meet top-seeded Steffi Graf, who eliminated upset-minded Manuela Maleeva-Fragniere 4-6, 6-1, 6-0.

Saturday's first men's semifinal sends 15th-seeded Cedric Pioline against unseeded Wally Masur. The second semi, following the women's title match,

sets No. 2 Pete Sampras against No 14 Alexander Volkov.

"I believe I'm a better player now," said Sukova, making her fourth career Grand Slam final appearance and her second trip to the title match at the National Tennis Centre. "And I deserve it. I'm more ready, better than I was in '86."

Against Sanchez-Vicario, it was the same Sukova who knocked out No. 3 Martina Navratilova in the fourth round. Now she is the lowest seeded women's finalist at the US Open since 16th-seeded Pam Shriver in 1978.

Sukova began to assume control in her semifinal midway through the second set as a few rain drops splattered on the court. A hard rain drenched the

court after Sukova held serve to being the third set, interrupting play for nearly 45 minutes.

"I wasn't unhappy with the break," Sukova said. "The break made me decide to play better. I ran better. We've been going on and off all the time. I'm getting used to it."

When the two returned to the court, it was all Sukova, who grabbed control of the net and ran off point after point with crisp volleys. And when she did stay back, she slammed groundstrokes for winners.

"I had my chances and I didn't take them," Sanchez-Vicario said. "Today wasn't my best day. I'm happy for her. One or the other has to win."

In the second semifinal, Maleeva-Fragniere, who has said this will be her last US Open, almost followed Sukova into the winner's circle.

Playing with a broken little finger on her left hand, Maleeva-Fragniere broke Graf twice to start the match and survived an incredibly long, intense 28-point game to hold to 5-3. She closed out the first set with a love game, the final point coming on a wicked backhand slice cross-court that Graf just stared at.

"I just couldn't get going," Graf said. "I made a lot of easy mistakes. I was surprised I was tight in the beginning, not ready for the match. Sometimes I have to remain myself of who I am and how I can play tennis."

Graf, who made 19 errors in the first set, pounded balls into the corners in the second set while working on Maleeva-Fragniere's two-handed backhand. In the second set, Graf lost just five points on her serve and had nine unforced errors.

"I felt pain on the backhand return," Maleeva-Fragniere said. "I was playing just to put the ball in somehow."

Once Graf took control at 3-0, she never let go.

"It seemed she put every ball one inch over the net, one inch inside the baseline," Maleeva-Fragniere said. "It was difficult going for shots. Physically, she's stronger. I had the feeling I had to hit three times harder than usual. It just took too much out of me."

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